

CULTURAL CROSSROADS

A PUBLICATION OF THE MAYOR'S MULTICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ■ CITY OF LINCOLN, NEBRASKA ■ FALL 2002

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Joyce Quinn is the first to acknowledge that, in a perfect world, the need for her current job would not exist. In a perfect world, people would treat others with the respect and consideration due their fellow human beings. In a perfect world, there would be no discrimination based on an individual's gender, age or skin color.



As Affirmative Action Director for the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County and the Lincoln Electric System, Quinn understands that this kind of social utopia is unrealistic. But she does what she can to help level the playing field so that all individuals are treated fairly when it comes to consideration for employment. She is responsible for implementing the action-oriented steps that constitute the Lincoln-Lancaster County Affirmative Action Plan.

"Our Affirmative Action Plan places a lot of the responsibility on management," Quinn said. "They are the ones who have to make sure that all managers in their departments are practicing fair hiring practices and providing equal opportunity."

All City departments are required to have at least one affirmative action representative who monitors the "departmental climate" as it relates to the Affirmative Action Plan. They report to Quinn twice a year. Building and Safety Director Mike Merwick is one of the department directors who serves as his own.

"Diversity and equal opportunity have always been a priority for me," Merwick said. "I feel that we all have a personal responsibility to recruit a diverse pool of candidates when employment opportunities become available. From a personal standpoint, I feel that we all will become more well-rounded individuals by meeting new friends and co-workers from diverse cultures."

Quinn monitors statistics that help her determine which cultures are represented among the City and County's new employees. The same holds true for promotions, terminations and all other employment actions. All must be administered equally to all people.

Included in the information departments will report to Quinn are efforts that have been made to promote equal opportunity and any creative affirmative action steps that have been taken. They also must report any training they've provided for their management and employees that

will help enlighten them as to the goals of the affirmative action program and what their obligations are under the law.

"We'll work together to see where we're falling short and where we can make positive changes," Quinn said. "We'd like to see all departments do some self-scrutinizing and ask themselves the question, 'Have we done everything that we can to attract a diverse pool of employment candidates?'"

Quinn says she can't rely exclusively on complaints that may arise, because some individuals are reluctant to come forward. John Harris, a Diversity Fellow for the Affirmative Action Division, is developing a survey to be sent to all minority employees that will help gauge the current employment climate from their perspective. Quinn hopes the survey will provide a better understanding of areas where working conditions can be improved even if there haven't been complaints.

Quinn says there can be many reasons why hires are not being made from a diverse population. Perhaps they're just not walking in the door or they're under-qualified. Quinn said local government jobs don't turn over or open up rapidly. Another reason may, unfortunately, be discrimination. The Affirmative Action Division must determine the real reason the number of minority candidates or hires is deficient.

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MEETTHEMAC



NEW MEMBER



The newest member of the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee is John Leonard Harris. He is the Founder and President of Encouragement Unlimited, which provides motivational and inspirational programs to diverse audiences across the country. He has conducted diversity and cultural awareness programs for colleges and universities, school districts, businesses,

community centers and religious organizations. John is also serving as a Diversity Consultant for the City of Lincoln.

John is a native of St. Louis, Missouri and earned a bachelor of arts degree in Speech and Dramatic Arts from the University of Missouri-Columbia. He has also done graduate work in the field of social psychology. For nearly eight years, he served as the Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. From August 1998 until June 2002, he served as Men's Youth Ministry Coordinator for Lincoln-based City Impact, Inc., working primarily with boys in middle and high school.

John has also written papers and articles on issues related to race, media, gender, racial identity and cultural diversity. His article, "The Portrayal of the Black Family in Prime-Time Network Television" for the Journal of Intergroup Relations, was named Article of the Year. John is an active member of Christ's Place Church and he has been a volunteer for many organizations including the Lincoln Action Program, the Lincoln Community Corrections Center, M.A.D. DADS, the Malone Community Center, the Nebraska Family Council, the Salvation Army and the YMCA.

APOLOGY REVEALS A SAD MIND-SET

by Leonard Pitts Jr., Miami Herald

An edited version of the following column appeared in the Lincoln Journal Star Saturday, October 5, 2002. The full column is reprinted with the permission of the Miami Herald. In addition to being a columnist, Mr. Pitts is also the author of Becoming Dad: Black Men and the Journey to Fatherhood.

It ought to tell you something that Abraham Montalvo Sr. felt compelled to apologize.

He had not, after all, done anything wrong. He wasn't the man who cased a rural Nebraska bank last week. Nor was he one of the three who subsequently stormed that bank, guns blasting, to slaughter five people.

No, he's just a guy from the community in question - Norfolk, about two hours northeast of Lincoln. The only thing Montalvo had in common with the four men arrested for the crime - Jorge Galindo, Erick Fernando Vega, Jose' Sandoval, Gabriel Rodriguez - was a Hispanic name. Apparently, that was reason enough for Montalvo to speak up at a memorial service and express contrition on behalf of local Hispanics.

"To the white community," he said, "please accept our profound condolences and sorrows. This community under no circumstances would never justify such a horrible act."

There is, if one has ears to hear, something plaintive and pleading about that statement. Something that sheds a telling light on what it means to be a minority among the majority.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

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Quinn said if she could have one wish as it relates to the Affirmative Action Plan in specific, and the way that people treat each other in general, it would involve a "buy-in" and acceptance of the personal responsibility involved when it comes to embracing diversity. She said that, like anything else worth achieving, true equal opportunity will not happen overnight.

"We've had about three centuries of discrimination in this country and we've had affirmative action for about 35 to 40 years," she said. "It takes time to undo this discriminatory mind-set that exists - not only the conscious beliefs of people, but also those which have become so automatic they are subconscious."



Consider that in 1991, a man named Jeffrey Dahmer was arrested for killing over a dozen men and boys. He had sex with the corpses, dismembered them, ate some of the remains. Dahmer was white; almost all his victims, black.

I don't recall any white man saying, "To the black community, please accept our profound condolences and sorrows." There was no apology white to black.

Nor, I hasten to add, should there have been. Jeffrey Dahmer's sins reflected upon Jeffery Dahmer. To the degree they carried any larger dimension, we understood it to be possibly environmental, perhaps psychological, but certainly not racial. No one would have argued that this obscene quirk of nature, this freakish statistical anomaly, "represented" white people.

Contrast that with the freeze frame moment, so familiar to blacks and Hispanics, that comes as the TV news anchor announces some particularly heinous crime. You wait on the mug shot or the police sketch all the time mumbling to yourself, "Please don't let him be black. *Por favor, no dejes que sea hispano.*"

Similarly, how many Muslims breathed a sigh of relief when the Oklahoma City bomber turned out not to be a Middle Eastern terrorist? And winced in pain when the Sept. 11 hijackers were found to be exactly that.

Because like it or not, when you are Muslim, black or Hispanic in the United States, you are a representative, a de facto emissary of your people, to the wider world. Worse, the scale is weighted against those unwitting ambassadors so that each time one excels, he or she is called an exception, but each time one screws up, he or she is called a confirmation, an "I told you so" that comes back to their community in the form of suspicion, acrimony and fear.

The dynamic is as unfair as it is inevitable. And its power over the

nation's minorities is, perhaps, difficult for many American whites to fathom. Most have never had to serve - much less live out their lives - as symbols of the group. So they will find it hard to make the leap of imagination necessary to understand what is felt right now by Nebraskans with names like Ruelas, Lopez and Gonzalez.

Norfolk's Hispanic population has grown mightily in recent years, a growth that doubtless brings with it all the bruises and growing pains that ordinarily arrive with an influx of newcomers. Now there's this prayer - *Por favor, no dejes que sea hispano* - that has gone unanswered. Now evil's last incarnation has Hispanic surnames. And at least some Hispanic people will therefore feel it necessary to hold close their children, watch their steps, wait for backlash.

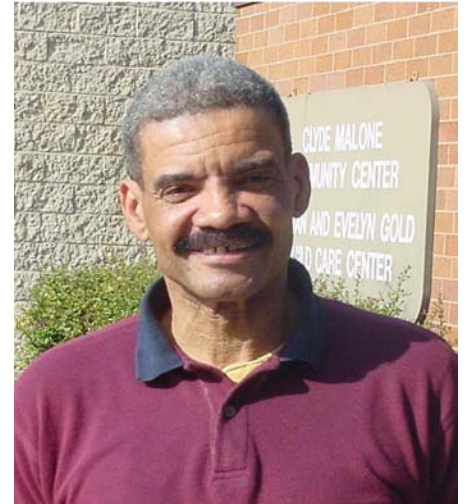
Abraham Montalvo's apology saddened me. It should sadden you, too. Earnest as it was, well intentioned as it was, the gesture nevertheless carried, in subtext, a tacit reminder:

"I didn't do it."

And that should have gone without saying.



A highlight of the "Patriot Day - Lincoln Remembers" memorial event September 11 was a naturalization ceremony for 25 new Americans. About 4,000 people attended the event at Pinewood Bowl in Pioneers Park to remember those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, to honor those who courageously responded and to celebrate what it means to be an American.



EURE is NEW MALONE DIRECTOR

Darryl Eure began working as the new Executive Director of the Malone Center October 7. The Malone Board selected Eure from 43 applicants for the position. Eure has been the pastor of the Freestone Baptist Church in Omaha for the past 15 years. He previously spent about 20 years at the Urban League, and he worked for several years at the North Christ Child Care Center, a community center that provides after school programs in north Omaha.

"My first goal is to get the building in tip-top condition," Eure said. "My overall goal is to institute programs that are relevant to the African American community as well as the surrounding communities."

Eure said planned programs include after school tutoring; computer availability for the entire community; activities for senior citizens; aerobics classes; and cultural arts activities. He is currently looking for volunteers, and those interested can contact him at 474-1110.

Eure, 52, and his wife, Gretchen, a supervisor for the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission, have two children - Anwar, a junior at Nebraska Wesleyan, and Aida, a sophomore at North High in Omaha

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The mission of the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee is to identify and recommend policies and strategies that enhance and support the full and equal partnership of people of diverse racial, cultural, economic, gender and disabled communities in City government and Lincoln community

Editorial Policy

This is a publication of the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee of the City of Lincoln. Material appearing in this publication shall be in accordance with the purpose, goals and official positions of the committee.

Submissions by community groups and individuals are welcome and will be considered for publication based on the following criteria: the article's compliance with the goals and official positions of the committee; the article's relevancy to the designated theme of that quarter's newsletter; and the length of the article. Articles may be accepted as written, edited or declined for publication.

Responsibility for final decisions lies with the committee chair and newsletter editors. Inquiries about this publication may be directed to the Chair of the Mayor's Multicultural Committee, Amrita Mahapatra, or Vice-Chair, Amir Azimi.



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